

## Creativity and collaboration: using CALL to facilitate international collaboration for online journalism at a Model United Nations event

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**Abstract.** Much has been gained over the years in various educational fields that have taken advantage of CALL. In many cases, CALL has facilitated learning and provided teachers and students access to materials and tools that would have remained out of reach were it not for technology. Nonetheless, there are still cases where a lack of funding or access to CALL tools prevents teachers and students from reaping the benefits of CALL. Furthermore, in countries inundated by technology, opportunities for students to create and collaborate using CALL may get lost amid the noise of the latest program, or the trendiest learning tools. The project described in this article involves students in a different way to use CALL for learning; it has them work together using technology, troubleshooting problems, and creating online news stories. This article describes a digital journalism simulation called JUEMUN Journalism. JUEMUN, the Japan English University Model United Nations, is an annual event that brings together students from around the globe to participate in a Model United Nations (MUN). A component of this event includes teams of journalists who cover the events at the MUN, and report on them in four formats: podcasts, video broadcasts, a written chronicle, and editorial cartoons.

**Keywords:** online journalism, Model United Nations, collaboration, troubleshooting.

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## **1. Introduction**

The teams that participate in JUEMUN Journalism are comprised of Japanese students and international students. The primary language for reporting is English, and has been expanded to include Chinese, Japanese, and Korean at the 2015 JUEMUN conference.

The benefits of this project are multifarious. The journalists come from a variety of cultures and academic backgrounds; these journalists collaborate on a common goal of reporting news from the MUN. Students are responsible for enlisting technology to help them create, write, and edit their podcasts, news videos, chronicles, and draw editorial cartoons. The journalists' mission is to make a plan, gather information and subsequently report on this three-day event in real time; the 2015 event had 276 students (199 Japanese and 77 international) from 47 universities with participants from over 30 different countries.

Rather than placing the emphasis on tools, students focus on content and ways to communicate that content to the world outside. Technology is an instrument used to reach a goal and remains in the background. The contents of the stories included issues related to fostering global leadership, peace, gender, the empowerment of women, poverty and inequality, reproductive health and rights, education, and climate change. The stories are uploaded to a website that allows others to engage with these important topics; these stories also help promote JUEMUN to future participants and interested educators.

Pairing students with different first languages and backgrounds and exposing them to global issues helps foster a culture of learning and inclusiveness that will serve students when they move out into the world after their studies. Furthermore, students are able to learn a number of technical and interpersonal skills by taking part in this project. This article gives one illustration of ways to get students to collaborate using CALL, and should be of interest to educators who explore ways to engage students in projects in which they create powerful content using technology.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. JUEMUN Journalism 2013 and 2014**

JUEMUN was founded in 2010. By 2013, it became obvious that there were many other educational opportunities that could be incorporated into JUEMUN to promote learning on a larger scale. In particular, students who may not be suited

to be MUN delegates, but who were eager to do something else needed an outlet. As a result, one of the founders of JUEMUN, Associate Professor Todd Thorpe, organized a group of students to report on the events at JUEMUN 2013. The first foray into JUEMUN Journalism had a big learning curve for both students and teachers. Equipment was sparse and students were not familiar with the software that was to be used to create the stories. Nonetheless, the students were able to produce a number of videos, podcasts and newspaper stories to create a record of the event. As the popularity of JUEMUN Journalism grew, international students joined the teams. This inclusion of students from abroad meant that problems with English language skills would be mitigated and the team dynamic would change to include broader perspectives and cross-cultural communication. JUEMUN Journalism 2014 saw a number of upgrades in equipment and students' technical skills. Each team was given cameras, IC recorders, and computers that had audio and video editing software installed on them. The volume of student output increased and the quality of the stories was raised.

## **2.2. JUEMUN Journalism 2015**

JUEMUN Journalism 2015 saw an even greater leap. In 2015, additional formats were added to make JUEMUN Journalism more culturally diverse and to include different types of learners. The languages that stories were created in were increased and went from English only, to Korean and English, Japanese and English, and Chinese and English. Furthermore, to include students who learn and express themselves differently, and who may not have the technical or language skills to be video, podcast, or newspaper reporters, editorial cartoonists joined the team.

## **3. Discussion**

From a CALL perspective, JUEMUN Journalism provided students with a number of opportunities to develop skills and use technology to create stories that could be shared with conference participants and the public at large. Nonetheless, as educators, the project faced a number of challenges, not the least of these was obsolescence in technology.

Educators must be aware of rapid obsolescence in technology. This comes in several forms, but the most common is functional obsolescence, where hardware requirements, or software changes obsolete the functionality of the software, and includes hardware obsolescence caused by software obsolescence; and software that obsoletes software. Less frequently encountered is logistical obsolescence, where parts are no longer available. There is also technological obsolescence,

where functional machinery is superseded by more advanced hardware ([Sandborn, 2007](#)). The JUEMUN journalists encountered all three of these situations.

Functionally, one of the advisors uses Pages word processing software on an older version of Apple's Mac mini. Although he exported his documents to Word format, they were unreadable by Windows PCs or newer Macs, causing a temporary bottleneck in the editing and uploading process.

Logistically, card reader adapters were needed for modern micro flash memory cards, and lightning-to-USB adapters were also needed.

Finally, technological obsolescence was encountered with the journalists' equipment. Each team was equipped with a high quality digital camera, and digital voice recorder for interviews. In practice the journalists preferred using their smartphones for photography and voice recording.

Educators need to ensure that their hardware and software are up to date, that the peripherals are fully integrated into the network, and that the tools are appropriate for the users.

#### **4. Conclusions**

As mentioned above, there were a number of learning opportunities, as well as challenges, in the JUEMUN Journalism project. The greatest achievement that students saw was the ability to use technology to create high-quality multimedia reports in a variety of languages. The greatest challenge that students and teachers faced, despite careful planning, was in troubleshooting technical problems.

While JUEMUN Journalism is a simulation of online journalism, the technical problems were anything but simulated. Students and advisors working in a number of formats had to find ways to remedy compatibility issues and find workarounds so the journalists' assignments could be completed and published online and on time.

Limited budgets and time constraints often prevent people in educational settings from keeping up with the latest technology. However, this does not mean that students and teachers should be prevented from harnessing the power of CALL for learning. Rather, these obstacles allow teachers to rethink how CALL can be used; now more than ever, CALL can encourage educators to innovate. CALL, as an educational methodology, has seen a number of changes and has reached a level of

maturity that should position teachers to reflect on, and revise, certain educational practices and goals. JUEMUN Journalism should serve as an example of how changes in technology and pedagogy can be embraced to provide meaningful educational opportunities to learners. Materials created by the student journalists can be viewed on the JUEMUN Journalism website: <http://juemun.weebly.com/juemun-journalism.html>.

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